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1898

HOME FROM
THE

A RHYME OF
THANKSGIVING

WAR

MARY LOWE DICKINSON

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ms MARY (LOWE) DICKINSON

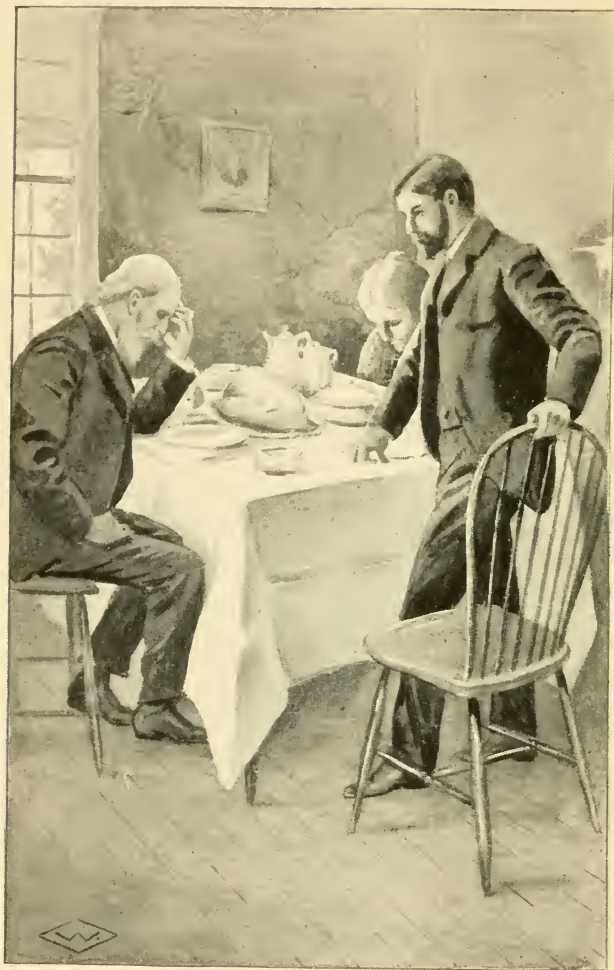
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"No stranger, but our Ben."



HOME FROM THE WAR

A RHYME OF THANKSGIVING

MARY LOWE DICKINSON

'Twas close to the aidge of the evenin',
The tin dipper hung by the pump,
I filled it up full, and was bendin'
To sprinkle the hickory stump
That Caleb had lugged to the fireplace,
Before he went down to the store—
"It'll be lots er company fur ye,"
He said, as he stood by the door,
The light jest a flickerin' and flashin'
Over his dear wrinkled face.
I went on a-wipin' the dishes
And settin' 'em down in their place
On the ilecloth that covered the table—
That ilecloth is one means of grace,

For we set up housekeepin' with damask,
 'Nough of it and china to match,
And I've made it hold out till there's scassly
 A place left to darn or to patch.

But I'm gittin' ahead er my story :
 As I sot down them dishes, I knew
To-morrer Thanksgivin' was comin',
 And never a bake nor a stew
Goin' on,—not a pie nor a doughnut,—
 Not even a pot of baked beans.
Not a log of wood left in the woodshed,
 And that stump a-wastin' its means
On me—all alone—when poor Caleb
 Would come by and by from the town
Wet through, and beat out and a-wheezin'
 So he couldn't sit up nor lie down.

We had raised quite a lot o' fat chickens,
 Sold all but the old yaller hen,
Held onto for Calëb's Thanksgivin'
 Till we spent the last dollar ; and then,
When wust come to wust, he jest took her
 And went off to sell her for bread.
“ Lord knows where the next is to come from,”
 Upraisin' my dipper, I said,
When, suddint, a step in the doorway,
 A hand reachin' out to my hand,



"Give me the water.
Don't waste it on that blazin' brand."

A voice sayin,' " Give me the water,
Don't waste it on that blazin' brand.'"
I turned, and there riz up before me
A man lookin' some like a tramp,
Tho,' scared as I was, suthin' told me
He wasn't an aout and aout scamp.

" I'm cold, and tired, and hungry,
Can you give me supper and bed? "
" I gave our last victuals to Caleb,
And he went away hungry," I said.

"And you? " asked the voice, kinder gentle.
" Well, / ain't sharp-set—not to-night—
Men are apt to be hearty, and Caleb
Didn't know he ate up the last bite ;
If he sells the old hen, I'm expectin'
He'll fetch home pertaters and bread.
And in the spare chamber there's waitin'——"
The aged voice trembled—it said,
" There's waitin' this long time, a bed—
Ben's bed, my own Bennie, our soldier,
That fit, bled, and suffered ; and then
When they turned out with brass bands and
banners
To welcome our brave, ragged men,
We put on our best clothes and waited,
But there wasn't no sign of our Ben.

There wuz boys that belonged to our neighbors,
But we've never heerd nothin' from Ben."

With my last, pale, sputterin' candle,
The stranger went up to Ben's room ;
I freshened the fire up for Caleb,
Whose comin' I felt in the gloom.

"I'd orter be middlin' keerful,
Folks ain't all wuth trustin'," he said.
But I noticed when I wasn't lookin'
He took his own teacup and bread,
And crept way upstairs in his stockin's,
And set 'em down close ter that bed.

And the mornin' broke out in a glory,
There was wine in the cool, crispy air,
The storm was just drowned in sunshine,
Thanksgivin' was everywhere.
Said Caleb, " For *three* there's a-plenty,
We won't keep pertaters ter spile ;
The tramp sleeps as sound as a baby,
Let's leave him to rest there awhile."
So we et, and started to meetin',
Leavin' the stranger his share ;
And our souls were fed by the sermon,
Our courage riz up with the prayer.
And we followed the path out the home-way,
Through rustlin' leaves of gold,



“ And we followed the path out the home-way,
Through rustlin' leaves of gold.”

As if a feast was a-waitin',
And we warn't nuther poor nor old.

Once home, the door we fastened
Swung as by unseen hands ;
The fire we banked and smothered
Leaped from its ashen bands ;
The empty, yawning cupboard,
Was with dainty food piled high—
There was the round plum-pudding,
There the three kinds of pie.
Before the fire stood, browning,
Not our old, scrawny hen,
But a fat and fragrant turkey ;
While the table shone again,
As in old days of comfort,
With cloth of snowy white,
With the dear, old-fashioned china,
And the teapot, silver bright.

Here was a *grand* Thanksgivin'
Fur Caleb and fur me ;
But, more, the pretty table
Was surely laid for three.
Between my seat and Caleb's
There stood an empty chair,

Tears choked his voice as Father said
“ Let us unite in prayer.”

As the old, white head bent lowly,
“ Praise God for all His grace,”
I felt a presence slowly
Creep to that vacant place.
I heard a voice, long silent,
Echo our hearts’ “Amen,”
And our lifted eyes beheld him—
No stranger, but our Ben.







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